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HINTS FOR YOUNG
WRITERS



HINTS FOR YOUNG WRITERS

BY

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POWER AND PLENTY," ETC.

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THE WRITER TO-DAY

FOR centuries it was thought that oratory was the greatest human achievement, the most perfect expression of personal power. It was long supposed that no other form of self-expression developed a man so thoroughly and so effectively, or unfolded his powers so quickly, as the effort to think upon his feet and to express himself before an audience. But many of the laurels that formerly went to the orator are now going to the writer, and I doubt whether there is any

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other form of self-expression or of achievement which gives such complete satisfaction as the writer's profession.

I know of nothing which so tends to accuracy of thinking and self-expression as the writing habit. It increases one's vocabulary and one's facility of expression. The very act of writing a thing tends to fasten it upon the memory, to impress it, to clutch it in the mind.

It is a process of perpetual discovery and surprises. No writer can know just what is coming into his thoughts. He is always tapping new veins, new ores of resourcefulness, for there is no limit to the visualizing, picturing powers of the imagination. Writing is a perpetual delight, a constant tonic.

THE WRITER TO-DAY

Though the creative process tires the brain, after he has rested, the author returns to his work with the same zest, the same enthusiasm and love as before.

The writer has many advantages over the public speaker. He can wait upon his moods; he can write when he feels like it; and he knows that he can burn as many manuscripts as he likes if they do not suit him. There are not a thousand eyes upon him. He does not have a great audience criticizing every sentence, weighing every thought. He does not have to step upon the scales of every listener's judgment to be weighed, as does the orator. A man may write as listlessly as he pleases, use as much or as little

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of his brain energy as he likes; no one is watching him. His pride and vanity are not touched, and what he writes may never be seen by any one; also there is always a chance for revision.

While the literary profession is perhaps the most poorly paid of any professional calling to-day, and those who rise to such eminence that their names command attention and possess advertising value for their publishers, are few and far between, yet we do not measure the value of a vocation by the amount of money that one gets out of it. Many of the best things in life are not remunerative from the money standpoint, but are of immense value to society.

LIVE, THEN WRITE

WHEN Harriet Beecher Stowe captured the world with "Uncle Tom's Cabin" her publishers demanded a new tale, and she wrote "Dred," a tale of the Dismal Swamp. Some witty paragrapher said: "Mrs. Stowe wrote 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' because she had a book to write, but she wrote 'Dred' because she had to write a book."

It makes all the difference in the world, whether you write because you must express yourself or because you are ordered to go and produce. Nothing is immortal which does not throb with eternal principle. No manuscript

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will live which has not first lived vigorously in the author.

Do you expect your reader to thrill with emotion? You cannot set the cords of his heart vibrating when your own were still and dumb. You can only create in the reader the duplicate of your own emotions. Action and reaction are equal. There is no art by which you can produce in the reader what you did not experience in yourself. If you have nothing to give, no life or beauty or truth, what you write will not be read. It all depends upon the fullness, the sweetness, the human interest, which you can inject into it; and it must be your own—you must be yourself, or die in your book.

The world is hungry for life, more

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life; it is interested in realities, in human experiences, in human struggles. There is nothing that interests man like man—personalities, human nature. If you are ambitious to be a great writer keep in touch with life. Do not allow the great veins of practical affairs to be cut off. The blood must come warm from the great heart of humanity. You must keep in touch with the great life arena. Mere theories do not go very far; it is life that counts.

If editors were asked what, in a word, is the greatest defect, the fatal weakness in the majority of manuscripts which come to them, they would say their lack of life,—and, lacking life, they lack interest, vivacity, charm,

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and fascination. One may outline the sentences and they analyze perfectly; they balance; the words are well chosen, but there is no great underlying throbbing pulse of life.

“Wouldst thou write a living book thou must first live.”

Do you put yourself into what you write? Does it take hold upon the very center of your life? Have you ground all your experience into paint, and projected it into the picture? You must live your story before you write it. Good composition throbs with life wherever you touch it. There is not a word too many or too few. Wherever you cut it, it bleeds,—it is so full of life-blood. Every word you come to is electric, like the touch of a live wire.

LIVE, THEN WRITE

“I do not want to write literature, I want to write life,” said the late Frank Norris. Most young writers try to write literature when the world wants life. It is that which must always be uppermost, it must dominate the mind. The motive must pulsate with the warm life-blood, or the book, the article will be cold, mechanical, and lifeless.

The compositions of many writers so lack incident, color, character, interest, that nobody wants to read them. They leave the Hamlet out of their play and then wonder why people do not come to see it.

The explanation of how some writers—like the late Owen Kildare, author of “My Mamie Rose”—who have had

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no training whatever in the schools, and who are ignorant of books, have written that which will live, is that they have written because they could not help it. There was something pent up within them which they simply had to tell, and they told it with all the energy and naturalness which they possessed, without trying to see how well they could balance their sentences. It was a spontaneous expression of that which they could not keep in any longer. This is the difference between writing life and writing literature. If the people who have written things which the world will not let die had tried to write literature, their works would have been dead long ago.

LIVE, THEN WRITE

We are, most of us, straining to effect some great thing: something far off and unusual, and we do not see the wonders at our very door. The simplest and the commonest things in life fail to captivate us, just as the stars remain unknown to the majority and uninvestigated because we can see them nearly every night.

Many unknown writers would find fame and fortune, if, like Bunyan and Milton and Dickens and George Eliot and Scott and Emerson, they would write out of their own lives, if they would put into their manuscripts the things they have seen, common, everyday things, things that they have felt, that they have known. It is life thoughts that stir and convince, that

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move and persuade, that carry their iron particles into the blood.

Young writers often make the mistake of choosing unusual topics. But the human heart loves the common things, the things which touch the every-day life. It is the daily experience, the commonplace glorified, which interest people most. The human heart never tires of friendship, love, suffering, struggle, victory and human happiness. The author who has that subtle quality that can see the uncommonness in the common, is the author that lives.

No one can put into his book anything greater than that which lives within himself. Most writers are dry and uninteresting, because their lives are pinched and lean and starved.

LIVE, THEN WRITE

When they give their books to the world they are like a lean, cadaverous professor advertising to give lectures on physical culture. Their poverty of thought and stinginess of soul are poor advertisements of their wares.

It is the rich life that makes the rich book, the rich picture. Michael Angelo's pictures are immortal, because his life had immortality in it. Raphael can never die, because there was immortality in his character; he spread his life on his canvas.

An author's spontaneous production partakes of his very life's blood. He is painting himself, just as the great artist paints himself into his picture,—spreads his thoughts, his feelings, his experiences, upon the canvas.

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You cannot write immortal things unless there is immortality in your character; you cannot write inspiringly unless you are giving yourself; you must ring true yourself or there will be a false, jarring note in your writings.

I have listened to preachers and orators who had a beautiful flow of language and great charm of speech, but they never convinced me; they could not get my confidence. There was lack of character, lack of a real man, behind the eloquence.

We often feel the same thing regarding a writer. We may enjoy reading him, but there is something lacking in the suggestion left in our consciousness—a lack of character in the man. We may never have seen him, never

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have heard anything against him, but we instinctively feel his deficiencies. The author can only write into the book what is in himself. We can only radiate our reality, express the truth of ourselves.

Character is the very foundation-stone of a great author. There must be a great man back of the pen or he will never carry weight in the world.

If you expect to interest the world in your book, you must be interesting yourself; your mind must be balanced, disciplined, stored with all that is rich and beautiful. It must be an electric battery, or you can never thrill your readers. It is the mind behind the words that makes a great book. Your mental larder must be stored

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with an abundance of rich things, or you cannot expect your guests to enjoy the feast; they will not come a second time to feed on husks.

It would be very helpful to young writers if they could know the thoughts which run through an editor's brain as he reads their manuscripts. "Poor fellow," he often says to himself, as he glances through the dry, dreary desert pages, "he has mistaken his calling. There is nothing but dust in this man. He has no message for the world. There is nothing in this writer that is struggling for expression. He does not write because he cannot help it, because there is something in him which *will* speak, which *must* speak; he is merely trying to make himself say

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something; he is not effervescing with ideas that will not down, with emotions that he cannot repress, or with thoughts that will not stay."

An experienced editor knows that it is not necessary to eat an entire ox to test the quality of the beef. A single paragraph anywhere in a manuscript gives him a clue to the quality of the whole. If the blood courses freely through that paragraph, he knows that there is something in the rest of it. If, however, the pulse of the writing is so faint that he cannot detect it after he feels for it in several places; if the vitality is so low, its circulation so feeble that he can scarcely tell whether it is dead or alive, he will drop the manuscript and turn to some other. The

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editor or reader is always feeling for the bounding pulse which indicates a strong, robust vitality.

An experienced, analytical reader could reproduce you from your book. He could pick out the countries you have visited, the experiences you have had, the extent of your education; he could give you a picture of your environment; he could tell whether necessity had been your spur, or whether you had been reared in luxury. He could tell by the poverty or the wealth of your language, by the extent of your vocabulary, what degree of culture you had obtained. He could pick out your associates and give a picture of your intimates, for all you can do is to put yourself into your book, whether

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your ideals are high or low flying; he does not need to see you in person, he sees you in your book.

THE PERSONALITY IN YOUR BOOK

IN a certain author's recent work we can detect a decided tired feeling.

The work is evidently the result of a forced brain. There is in it a lack of spontaneity, an absence of sharp, clean-cut sentences and the grasping thought. It gives evidence of a flabby brain. There is in the whole book a lack of vigor, of robustness of thought.

In an interview with Theodore Roosevelt he told me that he owes everything to his active life and vigorous outdoor exercise. He said that his career would have been absolutely impossible without this training; that

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he owes much of his success to his experience as a cowboy in the West, and that he believes thoroughly in building up the body in every possible way; not especially in order to become an athlete—he said that he never did anything well in the athletic line, except, possibly, wrestling—but rather to become strong for the sake of the reflex influence upon the mind.

A strong mind must be backed up by a strong physique—by an overflow of animal spirits. Great things must appear to have been done easily. The straining of a weak, low vitality to do great things is not effective. The tracks of effort—the evidences of strain and stress—must not be in any commanding achievement.

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You may be sure that your weakness, whatever it is, will crop out in your writing. The best thing you will ever do will be done by your vital or healthy side. No amount of will power can compensate for a fagged mind in a weak body. A vigorous pen must be guided by a vigorous nature. Weak, bloodless composition will never stir a reader. There must be a great, strong pulse back of it all. If you have not the grit in yourself it will not flow from your pen.

No one likes to read the vaporings of a feeble thinker. The average reader can tell very quickly whether a writer is in strong, vigorous condition, or jaded from dissipation, overworked or has a weak constitution. The pub-

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lic is merciless; it demands that a man be ever at the top of his condition. Readers do not take any excuses; that you were out late nights, that you overloaded your stomach at a banquet, or that you have some physical weakness.

Many writers do not appreciate the great fact that readers will draw out of every book just what the writer put into it—his moods, his physical condition, his mental and moral status, his melancholy or his mirth, his joy or his sorrow, his uplifting optimism or his blackening pessimism, the tonic of his courage, or the depression of his despair. Each reader has the same feeling which the author had; that is, if he is tired and jaded—if his brain is

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fagged when he writes—no matter how weighty his words or how brilliant his thought, the reader has the tired feeling, too. In other words, we have no power to communicate anything except what we feel ourselves. We radiate our own feelings. Others about us feel what we are—not what we pretend to be, but the truth about us.

The moment the mind begins to tire, and you feel your faculties begin to lag, stop writing. I do not believe in the “midnight oil” business for writers. The man who, with a wet towel about his head, forces himself to produce thoughts for a book or an article, must expect the reader to resort to the same means to keep himself awake while reading it.

THE PERSONALITY

Freshness, spontaneity and vigor are absolutely essential to all good composition. No amount of ability or learning in an author can take their place. There must be a crispness, or freshness, together with the vigor of thought which fascinates and holds the reader, or he will lose interest.

Often an author fails because his writings lack these essential qualities. Many of the most instructive books ever written lie on the shelves unread because they are labored or heavy. Learn to express yourself forcibly and yet with a certain lightness of touch, which takes a subtle and yet firm hold on every reader. You may never have had a chance at him before. Hold on to him. Let him feel, when he strikes

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a thought of yours in a book or an article, that there is a gripping power back of it. Let him feel the sentences bite.

If your personality is to be felt in its maximum force in your writing, you must be at your best physically when at work. A tired, jaded, weak, exhausted man does not radiate force or power. Neither he nor his work will make a deep or lasting impression.

The writer's mental health is not only dependent on his physical condition but, more than in less temperamental persons, it rests upon environmental influences. People with artistic temperaments, writers, and minds that create, are, as a rule, affected more, crushed more, by little annoyances, than people with a matter-of-fact tem-

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perament. This is the price that the artistic nature pays for its special talent.

There are plenty of literary workers who think that they are already doing all that they can stand, who could double their mental output, if they would only learn the art of protecting the faculties they are using. If they are using creative faculties, they should avoid confusion in their environment, which destroys the power to concentrate. The mind that is creative must be free from anxiety, from worry. Things which would not disturb others will often throw them completely off their balance. Too much detail injures the creative mind. The man who is doing creative work must have har-

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mony. Discord is fatal to originality.

Many an author with ability fails because he does not put himself in a position where he can get absolute freedom from constant interruptions, from little domestic worries and annoyances. Many authors make the mistake of trying to write at home, without having a secluded den or room which is away from noise and interruptions from children or servants.

In other words, the man who is to succeed in literature, who would do anything distinctive, must put himself in a position to use his creative faculties to the best possible advantage. An attractive, harmonious environment is a great stimulus to the creative mind.

FIXED HABIT OF WORK

THE creative process is the mind's gymnasium. To set aside a certain time or times each day, when you marshal to the front the best that is in you, when you fling the weight of your whole ambition into your concentrated thought and try to express it with power by your pen, your brush, or your oratory, will cause you to grow. You will feel yourself expanding, your horizon receding. You will feel a thrill of satisfaction which never comes from copying, imitating, or reproducing from memory.

Such constant exercise is essential to facility, dexterity, ease, freedom in

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composition, which are everything to the writer. If he does not keep in perpetual practice, the art will slip away from him. There will be something lacking in his composition. It will be stiff, unpolished; traces of effort will be visible—and true art erases every vestige of effort.

People who only work when they feel like it, lose a great deal of inspiration, because when the mind has formed the habit of doing the same things at about the same time every day it usually drops into the right mood for it at the appointed hour, and no time is lost in waiting for favorable moods.

I know a successful writer who once wrote with the greatest irregularity,

FIXED HABIT OF WORK

because he said he could not work except when the fit was on him, when he was just in the right mood. The result was that sometimes he would wait for weeks for this mood. After a while he became discouraged by having to wait on the vagaries of his mood, and resolved that, come what would, he was going to sit down at his desk, take his pen and begin to write at just such a time every day, whether he felt like doing so or not. In a few months he found that when the time came for writing he was usually in the mood, and his power of concentration grew with the regularity of his habit.

Previous to this he would sometimes sit up all night writing when the mood was upon him, fearing that it might

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be a long time before it would come again; and the irregular life began to tell upon his health. The fixed habit of regular work soon restored his nervous energy.

As a rule, the brain, if kept healthy, will measure up pretty nearly to what is expected of it. There is everything in expecting it to work at an appointed time. When the writer has formed a fixed habit of work the mind ought to go to its task as fresh, as enthusiastic and expectant as a vigorous athlete in superb condition goes to a race.

There is no happiness or satisfaction quite equal to the normal exercise of a splendidly trained mind at work, whether it is planning business, writing a book, or painting a picture.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORD.

“**I** HAVE found it at last!” exclaimed a famous writer, one day, while walking in company with a friend. “Found what?” asked his friend. “Why, that word I have been hunting for days.”

Luther said: “Words are living creatures with hands and feet,” and French’s lectures on words make one realize that they are not mere symbols, but are vital. As Emerson has said: “Words are fossil history.” For a given idea there is only one right word to use; all others are merely near-

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right, and fail by just so much in expressing the real thought.

It is strict attention to the choice of words and their arrangement and the greatest care in bringing out the delicate shades of meaning that make polished writers and orators. A great writer or speaker uses words as a great artist uses colors and tints. A word which does not precisely fit the thought offends his taste as much as green where blue is required would offend the taste of an artist. Some authors wait for hours or days—leaving blanks in their manuscripts—for the right words to convey the exact shading of their thoughts. When Kipling does not find a word just suited to his meaning, he invents one, usually so

THE RIGHT WORD

expressive that it becomes a permanent addition to our language.

The language even of educated people often bears the marks of a pinched vocabulary, which indicates the lack of a wide range of reading or a large experience in the practise of elegant conversation. I have in mind a man who failed to reach the success for which he had undoubted ability because of a restricted, narrow, limited vocabulary. He was constantly repeating himself. He thought in a circle, and could not express his ideas in fresh, vigorous language, because of his poverty of words.

The best writers seem to appreciate the fact that words have distinct flavors, that they are not merely mechan-

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ical blocks for language building, but that they have a liquidity through which the thought flows.

The picture drawn by Barrie, in "Sentimental Tommy," of his hero hunting for a particular word is not overdrawn. It shows the budding genius of a future writer. Tommy Sandys is given a last chance to win a scholarship. He failed at the regular examination, but in this second contest—the writing of the best essay on a given subject—Tommy's friends were confident of his success, his fame as a writer of letters and compositions having spread far beyond the village of Thrums. Tommy's heart beat joyfully. He already counted the scholarship his. He began to write, and

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his pen traveled on without pause to about the middle of his second page. Then he paused. He wanted a single word in the Scotch dialect to express an idea. He thought of several which would pass muster, and which, indeed, the examiners would not question, but the one which expressed the exact shade of meaning he wished to convey would not come. It was "on the tip of his tongue," as he afterward explained, but still evaded him. An hour went by almost before the boy was conscious of it. Everything was forgotten—the examination and the consequences hanging on its results, the time, the place, the people, all but the missing word. With a gasp he came to a realization of conditions around

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him when he was asked to hand in his essay. It was only begun. It could not even be considered in the competition. Yet Tommy could have outdistanced all competitors had he been satisfied to use a word that would do fairly well. But the artist, the genius in him, could be satisfied with nothing but the exact one, and after being dismissed in disgrace he returned to poke his head inside the door and exclaim, triumphantly, "I ken it noo; it's *puckle*."

Slipshod writers who use any word which happens to come to them, regardless of whether or not it conveys the precise shade of thought they have in mind, because they are too careless or indolent to search for the right

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word, never become great authors. Many articles in newspapers and periodicals are contributed by writers of this class. Many of the "best-selling" books, even if lauded by reviewers, more enthusiastic than critical, as "great books," often contain glaring inaccuracies and misapplied words.

"On a single word," said Wendell Phillips, "has hung the destiny of nations." No one knows better than he did the exact value of words. He was easily the foremost forensic orator America has produced, and his eminence was due to the high standard he set for himself. Every word exactly expressed the shade of his thought; every phrase was of due

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length and cadence; every sentence was perfectly balanced.

A man who can express his thoughts in simple, transparent language—in words that exactly fit his ideas—no more, no less—is a rare being. Accuracy of detail is one of the characteristic traits of a genius, whom Dickens has somewhere described as “a being who pays attention to trifles.”

But remember that no synonym taken from Roget or from Soule belongs to you until it is a vital part of your vocabulary. You cannot select a word and use it, because you are *told* that it is a synonym, while your knowledge of the word lacks intimacy and your use of it lacks flexibility.

As a matter of fact the English lan-

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guage has no exact synonyms. Inevitably if there were two words in English expressing exactly the same meaning, one of them would be taken and the other left. You will find the study of the rise and decay of words a most fascinating one. Who uses the word *nocent*? And yet *nocent*, or harmful, existed before the word *innocent*, or not harmful, but was crowded out to give place to a more positive word.

Young people are often too much in a hurry to discriminate finely and choose delicately the words which exactly express their thoughts. Yet the words should exactly fit the idea. Clean-cut fittingness and aptness strike an editor immediately. He can tell quickly whether a writer is an

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artist or a sloven. He knows whether or not you have picked up your words without fully understanding their meaning. Make a practise of looking up in a good dictionary every word you do not thoroughly understand. Learn to go to the bottom of things yourself. A habit of investigating the meaning of words, by looking up their synonyms in dictionaries or thesauruses, does not involve a waste of time, for a rich, well-rounded vocabulary is one of the finest possessions of life.

USE SIMPLE LANGUAGE

IT was Horace Greeley's method to wield the blue pencil on all fancy writing. A reporter's story read: "The conflagration painted the heavens a flaming yellow." Mr. Greeley said: "Mr. Smith, what you meant to say was, 'the flames lit up the sky,' wasn't it?" "Yes, sir." "Then say what you meant to say," and jab went the blue pencil.

A beginner in the art of writing or speaking often aims at great ornamentation and elaboration, thinking that much filigree-work and many words of great length and sonorousness make a

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stronger impression than plain, simple language. It is quite the reverse. Simplicity, as well as precision, is essential to the best speaking or writing. As masterpieces of literature, the Bible and the works of Shakespeare are pre-eminent. A young writer who aims at perfection can do no better than take these as his models. To show how elaboration or ornamentation would destroy the sublimity and effectiveness of Bible narration, G. P. Quackenbos transforms the verse in Genesis which describes the creation of light—"And God said, Let there be light; and there was light"—into "The sovereign arbiter of nature, by the potent energy of a single word, commanded light to exist, and immediately it sprang into

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being.” The stately lines of “Paradise Lost” are simplicity itself.

In many of the manuscripts that go to editors to-day the thought of the writer is subterranean. It seldom comes to the surface. The editor has a feeling that there is something there if he could only get it out; but the writer’s mind was clouded; the style is involved and overwrought; the expression is not clear, the language is obscure.

The trouble with most writers is that they are “addicted to language”—their thought is covered up with words, words, words. They should take the advice of Tryon Edwards: “Have something to say, and stop when you’re done.”

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You may be really conscious that you have a message for the world, but disappointed because you have failed to work your thought out on the surface sufficiently to enable readers, who have not been trained to think deeply, to grasp it. Many writers burrow into their theme. They do not realize that the casual reader does not follow them in their burrowing into the depths of the subjects in which they have been absorbed for months and perhaps years. The result is, they shoot over their heads. Clergymen are constantly doing the same thing in their sermons. We are too apt to think that people are in the same position as ourselves, that they see things from the same viewpoint as we do.

USE SIMPLE LANGUAGE

Play-writers often fail because their plots are too complicated for their audience. The majority of people who visit the theaters are not great thinkers; they are hard workers, and in their leisure hours they want to be amused, and not made to think. Very few people go to the theater to be improved or to stimulate their brains. They want recreation. Nature is seeking compensation for the strain, for the wear and tear of the day's work.

Easy reading comes from hard writing. It is not an easy thing to work one's thought out from the depths of his mind and bring it to the surface and express it so simply and so forcefully that the reader cannot help taking in the idea at a glance.

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Authors have died wretchedly disappointed, of broken hearts, because ideas which enraptured their own souls fell flat upon the public mind. They were never able to understand the tremendous difference between the interest they themselves felt in their books and their cold, indifferent reception by the public.

Many of the best books that have ever been written, containing much of the finest philosophy, the profoundest reasoning, lie dusty on book-shelves and in libraries, simply because the writers did not work their thought out upon the surface sufficiently to be taken in at a glance by the casual reader. The thought is buried under verbiage. There are plenty of good

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ideas in these volumes but the thought has never been mined; it is still in the ore. The thought-nuggets are still unsmelted. A few profound thinkers read these buried-thought books and set great value upon them, but unfortunately the average reader, in this age of superficial thinking, only grasps the meaning that lies on the surface. If these great but unpopular writers would spend more time in expressing their thought simply, it would popularize their writings wonderfully.

The greatest writers economize the reader's attention. They do not leave anything for the reader to do that they can possibly do for him. They do not cover up their thought by useless words or by circumlocution. It lies on

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the surface in clear, simple, limpid language.

The ever-living authors have expressed their thoughts in transparent language. They have stripped the expression of their ideas of wordiness, of all superfluity. They have chosen words which exactly fit the thought. They have left no traces of anything perishable which time can corrode or affect, and this is why they live always.

If I were to start out again as a writer, I would practise several hours every day for many months—in fact, I would keep this practise up for years, to see how much I could express, and how clearly, in the fewest words and in the simplest possible language. I would take several subjects which

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interested me. I would turn each over in my mind for a long time, and then, after I had thoroughly considered and mastered it, I would write with as much expression, strength and interest as I possibly could, and in the fewest words. In order to get the value of a fresh impression again, I would lay my manuscript aside for awhile and then take it up, read it over, think it over, and rewrite it, to see if I could not express the same thing more forcefully and interestingly, and in simpler, more transparent language. I would repeat this exercise many times for all my different subjects until I could not improve any one of my manuscripts in any single word.

It is said that David Belasco's great

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success as a producer of plays comes from his remarkable skill in theatrical surgery. He dissects every new play that comes to him as an anatomist would dissect the human body. He weighs every word, every sentence, every speech, eliminating every bit of dead-wood, every phrase and paragraph that does not have a definite bearing on the end in view. A playwright, referring to Belasco's examination of his plays, says: "From ten in the morning frequently till three the next morning we went through the play with microscopic care. Often we spent hours on a few lines, or a single speech."

CONCISENESS

WHEN some one told Mark Twain that he had a long story to submit to him, Twain replied that he did not care how much a man said, if he said it in a few words.

Conciseness, brevity of expression are characteristic of a great mind. Weak people use twice as many words as strong people. General Grant was a man of few words. Lincoln could put a great proposition into a brief sentence. Read the eighty lines of his Gettysburg speech. Not a single word could be eliminated without crippling the thought. It has the conciseness of

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condensation. Great minds have ever been simple in their language and concise in their expression.

There are comparatively few volumes which could not be compressed into a tenth of the space they fill and thus improve the expression of the thought without injury to the subject. Padded books do not live. It is only the pure thought that stands the test of years; that survives the remorseless ravages of time which consigns to oblivion everything that is superficial, that is spurious, shoddy or sham. Only that which is genuine will live.

Certain writers have what corresponds to loquaciousness in some conversationalists. They talk on forever without saying much of anything.

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Many are like some of our railroads which have very poor terminal facilities. They string out their thoughts endlessly, until they tire out the reader and he loses all interest. The preface of some writers reminds one of a man who begins to run so far back from the ditch he is trying to jump across, that when he reaches it he is tired out, and has not strength enough to jump over. The reader is exhausted before he has finished the introduction.

The young writer should not only aim, but should also strive for short words, short sentences, short paragraphs, short articles, short books. He should learn to condense every sentence to the minimum.

I know of no experience so valuable

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to a young writer as writing advertisements. It is an excellent training in brevity, conciseness and clearness of expression. Here is where one learns to get rid of all superfluous words, to choose words with discrimination and with fine shades of meaning.

It is a splendid practise for young writers to imagine that what they write they are to cable across the sea at a shilling a word. They will be sure to be surprised to see how many ideas a few words can express.

One of the best possible drills for the young writer is experience on a great daily. This involves actual contact with the thing itself; not theory, but realistic description of an accident, or whatever it may be, that he is sent

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to report. Here he touches life for the first time. Long words and complex sentences are mercilessly blue-penciled by the practical editor. The "cub" reporter soon learns to come down to pure principles—simplicity and accuracy of observation. He learns, perhaps for the first time, that he must not only look but must also see; that he must not only listen, but also hear. He must reproduce the thing as it occurs in the most simple, compact language; his word-painting must be done in a few effective strokes. He must take the shortest cut to effectiveness; all redundancy, all superfluous language, all meaningless words, no matter how high sounding or how beautiful they may ring in his ear, he

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must cut down to the utmost brevity and simplicity.

He may not recognize his first manuscripts when the hard-headed, practical editor finishes with them, but he will learn a lesson which he will never forget.

A young reporter wired a New York editor that he had a good story but that it would take a couple of columns of space. The editor wired back, "See the story of creation told in about eight hundred words." The old-time reporter wrote to fill space; the new reporter writes to save it. This motto appears in the editorial office of a great newspaper: "Terseness, accuracy, terseness." There is no room to-day for the long-drawn-out writer. This

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is a boiling-down age. There is no room for the round-about man. Directness is the watchword of our time.

Remember that this is a strenuous time-saving age. People are too busy to wade through a lot of chaff to get a few kernels of wheat. Get the chaff out of your thought. Winnow your ideas. Only give your pure wheat thoughts to the public. If a young writer would only start out holding constantly in mind the determination to save the reader's time, to economize his attention by cutting out every useless word, condensing everywhere, not only would he give himself a most helpful training in composition, but also his articles and books would be read and praised.

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It costs some magazines about two hundred and fifty dollars a page to place before the reader their literary material. A publisher cannot afford to spend two hundred and fifty dollars to market ten dollars' worth of ideas spread over a whole page, when they could have been expressed in a paragraph. If you are wondering why your articles come back from publishers, just try the experiment of rewriting them in the shortest, sharpest, clearest, simplest, most effective way possible, and send them again. The chances are that you will receive a check, instead of "Returned with thanks."

The literary aspirant can form no better habit than that of first writing

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down his ideas in the most concise language possible, afterward letting the manuscript stand long enough to enable the writer to get a fresh impression, then rewriting it until condensation can be carried no farther without loss.

Readers know, when they see the signature of a writer who has the reputation of boiling down his thoughts, that they will not waste time.

Many a young writer has made a reputation by his first article or his first book, because, while he was in doubt whether the public would read what he wrote, he condensed, rewrote, recast, and cut out all superfluous matter; but later, when the demand for his

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work increased, he let hurried manuscripts go out of his hands, thinking that people would read anything he might write, and soon he realized that his books remained unsold.

Nothing else will kill a writer more quickly than an idea that the public will take anything he writes.

Great writers and great orators have always developed the power of focusing their ideas in the simplest and most telling language. What a model of elegance is Lincoln's Gettysburg speech, which has the simplicity of Bunyan, the forceful imagination of Burns, and the sound reason of Washington!

If you want to do substantial work, concentrate; and if you want to give

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others the benefit of your work, condense.

“Would a pound of feathers fall to the ground as quickly as a pound of lead?” was the question asked a class, of which Gail Hamilton was a member. “Yes, if the feathers were rolled just as tightly,” replied the future author. Roll your arguments “tightly,” that they may have weight. The leaden bullet is more fatal than when multiplied into shot.

“Genuine good taste,” says Fénelon, “consists in saying much in a few words, in choosing among our thoughts, in having order and arrangement in what we say, and in speaking with composure.”

“If you would be pungent,” says

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Southey, "be brief; for it is with words as with sunbeams—the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn."

"When one has no design but to speak plain truth," says Steele, "he may say a great deal in a very narrow compass."

The fame of the Seven Wise Men of Greece rested largely upon a single sentence by each, of only two or three words.

"The wisdom of nations lies in their proverbs."

Gems are not reckoned by gross weight. The common air we beat aside with our breath, compressed, has the force of gunpowder, and will rend the solid rock. A gentle stream of persuasiveness may flow through the mind,

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and leave no sediment; let it come at a blow, as a cataract, and it sweeps all before it. Mere words are cheap and plenty enough; but ideas that rouse, and set multitudes thinking, come as gold from the mine.

Begin very near where you mean to leave off. Brevity is the soul of wisdom as well as of wit.

READABILITY

IT is useless to say that people *ought* to read good matter. If it does not interest them, they will refuse it. You can lead a horse to the water but you cannot make him drink. We can put the best reading into a man's hand but we cannot make him read unless it appeals to him.

Many a would-be lecturer has failed because he did not make a study of his audiences. He gave the same lecture to a cultivated audience, in a community where the standard of education was high, as he gave to an audience of working people in a manufacturing town. The writer likewise needs

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to know his audience. No author is big enough to make such a broad appeal as to be universally read. The writer, like the successful orator or editor, should enter into close fellowship with his public. He should understand his readers' predilections, their requirements, and publish things which will inspire them and interest them vitally.

The great trouble with many aspirants in literature is that their words lack force and fire. They do not carry conviction. They do not make vivid pictures. They are characterless and energyless, like those who use them. The forceful writer must have the courage of his convictions. The timid person who veers this way and that, for

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fear of what people will think of his work, never makes a vigorous writer. The element of timidity, hesitation, or fear in the mind of the writer will crop out in his writings. Fearlessness, however, must be accompanied by good judgment, saneness; otherwise one will say rash, foolish, tactless and untimely things. When courage is combined with common sense, and the writer has facility of expression, he will not lack for readers.

Few writers are able to inject such intellectual power and such vigor and force into their composition as to arouse and electrify the readers, so that they will become absorbed in their reading and forget everything else, even that they are on the earth. The

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really successful writer will infuse such life and enthusiasm into his writings that the reader will feel their magic spell for weeks or months.

Some great man said that he was so affected by his reading of Homer, so carried away with the marvelous heroes of the story that they haunted him when he walked the city streets. Men and women looked to him like giants ten feet high. Everything seemed to be bigger, to take on larger proportions. It is the writer's problem, as much as the orator's, to arouse the ambition, to stimulate men and women to higher and better ideals, to new resolutions to live the life worth while.

In one respect, especially, the writer is in the same predicament as the ora-

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tor. He must first put his audience in a good humor, he has to entertain them, interest them or they will sneak out through the back door and disturb the meeting. If an article does not begin well, if it does not catch your attention at once, if the reader has to wade through a lot of verbiage and deadwood, it will not be popular.

There is everything in not only getting a striking title for your book or article, but in getting striking titles for your chapter heads or divisions.

Many a really great book has gone unread and the author has died disappointed, because of a dead title, a title which has no snap, no life; the title should pique the curiosity.

“What’s in a name?” is a very sug-

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gestive phrase. For the writer there is everything in a name; that is, if the writer has anything worth while to say. If not, even the best title will not save his work from oblivion.

Some writers are like some salesmen, who can interest a prospective buyer, arouse and hold his enthusiasm and carry him along beautifully until he has *almost* persuaded him to buy, but they can't close, and they lose the customer. So some authors can introduce a subject beautifully, stir up the reader and arouse all his enthusiasm, until he resolves that he is going to do something and be somebody worth while. When he puts down such a stirring book he feels many times larger than when he began it; he feels certain that

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he is going to do great things. But his enthusiasm and zeal gradually cool and he finds himself dropping into his old lethargy. Many of these writers who stir the blood and inspire to heroic resolution leave the reader helpless to carry out their resolves, because they have not given the "how," they do not point out to the reader the ways and means of getting results; they leave him in the air.

A great writer ought to be able to take a common, dry subject and make it vibrate with life and thrill the reader. He ought to be able to clothe it in language so fascinating that the reader could not close the book until he had finished it.

Some writers are tantalizers. Every

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time we lay down a book of theirs we do so with regret; we want more. Authors like Dickens make us hungry for more. They are like a delicious, temptingly served dinner to a hungry man. They are appetizing writers. Others weary us, bore us. We read them from a sense of duty because they are instructive. We think they will be helpful, will add to our culture or enlightenment, but they do not leave any impress on the mind.

The test of a good book or a good article is that there is something in it that compels you to read it to the end. On many a winter's evening I have started to read a book with the determination to stop reading at about nine or ten o'clock and retire for a good

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night's rest, but have forgotten all about my resolution. The book was so intensely interesting, so fascinating, that I forgot all about my own existence, and lived with the characters portrayed by the author in his work, conversed with the vivacious heroine, intrigued with the plotting villain, warned the hero of some terrible calamity, and saw the hero and heroine happily married. When I reached the climax of the story, I would often find that the hands of the clock pointed to two or three in the morning. This shows how charmed one may become through the reading of a book that is actually alive. The characters seem to walk forth from its pages; the birds sing; we hear the babbling of the brook, the

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puffing of the train; we travel into foreign parts and visit historic places, view works of art; speak to a Webster, a Washington, a Plato, or a Ruskin. The king and queen of a monarchical government confide their most intimate secrets to us; we take counsel with them; we receive the last word of advice from a dying hero, as if it were actually intended for us.

The author who can put this spirit of life into his writings will not seek in vain for an audience.

Dion Boucicault, the playwright, in a lecture on writing for the stage, said: "There are just three things that I desire to emphasize as essential to the writing of a good play—the first is *action*, the second is *action*, and the

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third is *action*.” It is the same in fiction. People do not want long-drawn-out descriptions of scenery, they do not want protracted monologues by hero or heroine, they want action, movement, life; and, in so far as the writer holds the mirror up to nature, in so far he will succeed and win his public.

KEEP CLOSE TO LIFE

THE writer's main power comes from two sources—out of the depths of his own nature and from his experience with others, his contact with the world. If you would write for life you must not shut yourself out from life; nor must you always live in it, for you will lose something in either extreme.

No matter how hard a writer may study or how hard he may work, if he excludes himself too much from the world, he becomes one-sided, theoretical, impractical. He is apt to run into fads and all sorts of vagaries. His knowledge lacks breadth, practicabil-

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ity, and is too reflective. If, on the other hand, he lives too much with others, if he does not reflect enough, if he spends most of his time in social life, or in travel, his writings will lack that depth and richness which come from reflection, that mental power which is generated from great concentration.

Yet intellect alone, however masterly, will not preserve a book from oblivion. Jonathan Edwards was an intellectual giant, but his works have never been read to any great extent, except by scholars. They are too massive, too cumbersome, too involved. He lived too much in his study, he did not mingle with the world, did not touch human life at enough points.

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The old-time writer of the Middle Ages, who secluded himself in his study and never saw much of the world, has gone by. The demand to-day is for the practical as well as for the reflective. Any book to be popular must pulsate with warm human interest or, however deep and scholarly, it will be dry and uninteresting. The writings of some of the greatest minds that have ever lived are to-day unread because their authors lived secluded lives, did not mingle with the world at large. They were not students of human nature. There was not enough life, not enough human interest in their books to preserve them from decay. They were too heavy, too ponderous, too reflective, too subjective.

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A really great book must appeal to the masses, must be written in simple language. The author must mingle with men; he must be familiar with their life, with their aspirations, their hopes, their trials, their struggles. Dickens never grows old because he lived with the people.

One could name several authors who have been very popular for a long time, but who are rapidly deteriorating because their very success has tempted them to get out of the swim of things into semi-retirement, and they are gradually running out of raw stock without knowing it. They feel sure that their first books were not nearly as good as those that they have written since, but somehow there has not been

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the same vitality in their later books as in their former ones.

One reason why the sermons of so many of our clergymen are tame and insipid is because their authors lack experience in life. Sermons produced in studies are colorless unless the preacher during the week has been saturated with human experience, has been in close touch with human life. The secret of Beecher's marvelous oratorical powers lay largely in his keenness of observation. Nothing escaped his eye, and he translated everything he saw into life and expressed it in his sermons. I believe it would be a great thing for the churches if many of their pastors' studies were abolished, and the pastors were forced

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to draw their sermons from life, and to discard manuscripts. If they could give in their sermons the lessons drawn from the week's experience, their contact with life, spontaneously, directly, they would electrify their congregations.

OBSERVATION AND SELF- EXPRESSION

WE reflect all our life experience in our self-expression—in our writing or speaking—and this self-expression is rich and forceful, or poor and weak, according to the richness or the poverty of our lives. We can only give out that which we have taken in, *plus* what little we have inherited, and our inheritance is very small in comparison with what we have absorbed from life, from our training, from experience, what has been aroused in us, awakened in us, by the attrition of mind with mind.

A writer of power should be trained

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from childhood to see things as they are, and to see them in detail. Professor Agassiz used to leave a class for an hour observing a single fish scale, and then return and ask each member what he had seen.

If you attempt to write a story on a subject with which you are unfamiliar, it will lack atmosphere, exactness, accuracy; the description will be mechanical, warmed-over, it will not breathe life and truth, which can only come from personal observation. Unless the writer is a keen observer, unless he has been trained to see things accurately and to describe them graphically his book will be dry and insipid. He cannot help spinning out purely subjective matter from his own brain

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unless this be constantly fed with a stream of rich experience from without and close observation of life. All writers ought to have the observation of Ruskin, who saw a thousand thrilling beauties in the simplest object in nature. To him nature, largely closed to most people, was an open book. In the commonest weeds by the roadside he could see visions of beauty, traceries of design which would ravish the soul of an angel. Things which failed to attract the attention of others, would awaken a marvelous response in his soul and start trains of the richest thought.

The habit of carrying a notebook and treasuring up suggestive, unusual things improves the powers of obser-

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vation wonderfully. We often wonder where some authors find all the interesting things they write about. They find them because they are always on the lookout for them. They are always hunting for material. Just think how many curious, interesting things you have forgotten or lost during your life simply because you did not make them permanently yours by taking the pains to jot them down!

Few writers realize what a tremendous loss they sustain by neglecting to hold in some way their flashes of ideas that often come like lightning in the most unexpected moments, and that never come again in just the same form. They come fresh-made, clean-cut, out of the creative faculties, standing

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out with great clearness, and if you do not fashion them with your pen when they come or jot them down in a notebook so that you can recall them at will, the chances are that they will never come back to you, certainly not with anything like their first vividness and distinctness.

I remember hearing a writer tell how, when he was climbing the precipitous face of an Alpine crag, he was seized with an idea which he could not afford to lose. When he reached the top, he tried to transfer the idea to his notebook, but, try as he would, he could not reproduce it with the same vividness of first inspiration.

Many writers never carry a notebook in their pockets, and oftentimes

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their best thoughts, their most striking ideas come to them like flashes of lightning when they least expect them. These may arise from unrecognized associations of ideas that may be suggested to them, or they may have been called out of their subconsciousness from a suggestion, the source of which they cannot trace, but the same combinations, the same conditions which produce them are never likely to occur again; hence the importance of stopping short, no matter what you are doing, when such revelation flashes come, and making them permanent. By doing so you will attract more.

Even if you never write, the notebook habit would enrich your life wonderfully, and make you a much fuller, a

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more complete, more worth while man or woman.

A writer ought to have a splendid training from childhood, both in observation and in the art of self-expression. He should be trained in visualizing, in vividly picturing his thoughts and ideas. The imagination should be constantly encouraged and cultivated from earliest years. He should come to feel the indomitable necessity of self-expression.

A summer neighbor of mine amazed me recently by telling of the great variety of birds in our vicinity, and the remarkable things which they did. This lady is familiar with all the varieties of birds in that part of the country, and she says she picked up most

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of her information during her summer vacations, when tramping through the woods and across the country, and by reading about bird life. I had never imagined there were more than a dozen different kinds of birds in that vicinity, although I had lived in that section for years. I had never noticed more, perhaps, because I had not been looking for them. But this lady kept her eyes open; she was interested in these happy feathered creatures and studied them at every opportunity.

We often wonder when reading a book how an author could think of so many incidents, or how he could possibly have had such a varied experience. Much of this knowledge has come from the author's ability to use

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his eyes. He has learned not only to look but to see things, and to draw inferences and conclusions from his observations.

Agassiz would see more significance in a fish scale or a grain of sand, or a tiny fossil bone, than many men would see in a whole menagerie. Ruskin would see more of the real meaning, would read more out of a blade of grass or a single flower than many other people would see in an entire landscape.

A man is great in proportion to the use he makes of his senses; to his power to see things, to use his eyes, his ears.

When, my young writer friend, you think you have gotten all out of a

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subject that it contains, that you have exhausted its possibilities, just try to imagine what Edgar Allan Poe would have gotten out of it. Think of the long reaches of distance in every direction he would have penetrated beyond your limits.

What sort of an interview do you think De Voix, the greatest interviewer of the last century, would have brought back had he been sent to interview some great potentate or historic character? Go, compare your own efforts, your own narrow, limited, uninteresting article with one of his.

THE CAPACITY FOR TAKING PAINS

WHEN Louisa M. Alcott was first dreaming of her power, her father handed her a manuscript, one day, that had been rejected by James T. Fields, editor of the "Atlantic Monthly," with the message:

"Tell Louisa to stick to her teaching; she can never succeed as a writer."

"Tell him I *will* succeed as a writer, and some day I shall write for the 'Atlantic,' " said the young girl. The day came when work of hers was gladly accepted by that magazine. She earned two hundred thousand dollars by her pen. "Twenty years ago," she wrote

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in her diary, "I resolved to make the family independent, if I could. At forty, that is done. My debts are all paid, even the outlawed ones, and we have enough to be comfortable."

The conclusion of "An Old-Fashioned Girl" was written when Miss Alcott's left arm was in a sling, one foot bandaged, her head aching, and her voice gone. Her splendid will knew no defeat.

The art of expressing one's self on paper is one of the greatest accomplishments, but one of the most difficult to acquire. Yet people who would not think of attempting to play a piano in public until they had practised for weeks, or even months, will sit down, and in a few hours throw off an article,

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send it to a leading publication, and then be surprised when it is returned!

Our great musicians tell us that eternal vigilance, eternal practise, is the price they must pay for their skill. Constant, everlasting mental creation is the writer's gymnasium, where he must practise daily in order to keep his mind athletic, strong and vigorous; otherwise, it will lose its productive power.

To attain the power to express your heart's longings, your soul's aspirations, to describe life as you see it, is the work of years of hard and persistent practise, just as musical excellence is dependent upon constant application.

Of all the foolish things that any young person can ever do, taking up

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writing temporarily, just as a stepping-stone to something else, or till they can get a better job, is the most foolish. You might just as well try to be an artist temporarily, or a statesman, while you are waiting for a job. In the first place, you must be sure that you are fit for this work, for journalists and authors are born, not made. If you do not love the work, if it does not strike at the very center and marrow of your ambition, if you are lukewarm, indifferent, if it seems drudgery to you, you have made a mistake, drop it at all costs. No man ever succeeds in anything until he is proud of his work, until it tugs away at every nerve of his purpose. If you are not enthusiastic in your work, if you do not

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love it so well that you long to get to it in the morning just as quickly as possible, and dread the hour for leaving it, you may know that you are not born to wield the pen. The first test of authorship or journalism is an overwhelming love for it. If your heart is in it, and you work ceaselessly for success, you will succeed, but if it is a matter merely of mind or judgment, you will not make a great success of it.

Most young writers are too impatient to take the preliminary drill, to learn the fundamental principle which underlies all great composition. They are too anxious to appear in print; they want immediately to see their articles under glaring headlines, with their name in large letters.

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But success in any great art demands long and patient practise. It is related of D'Aubray, the French actor, that when he was playing a butcher's part in a piece, he rose early every morning for weeks to visit the markets and watch the butchers cut their meats. People who saw him in the play wondered at his familiarity with the butcher's art. In those early morning visits lay the secret.

The beginning of all vocations that are worth while are tedious; full of drudgery and perplexities, because everything is new and untried.

What years of patience and drudgery the ancient masters put into their foundations! Then men did not write for money but for art's sake. Our

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writers to-day are too much in a hurry to pay the price in any such painstaking.

“He was in too great a hurry to take pains,” would make a splendid epitaph for hundreds of failures to-day.

The editors of many magazines return “with thanks” about ninety-nine articles and stories out of every hundred submitted. The young writer cannot understand why his article is returned, as it seems to him so complete, so well-balanced, and his fine thoughts so beautifully expressed. But the experienced editor sees that the novice has been writing in a circle; he notes the narrowness of experience, the paucity of thought, the poverty of language, the limitations of vocabu-

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lary. He sees how little the writer has traveled, how ignorant he is of human nature, of the philosophy of life. Many of the articles sent to magazines would disgrace a high-school pupil. They lack style, not to mention continuity of thought, and are totally without point or purpose. The great majority of them lack individuality. Incompetence is apparent in every line.

Good articles are often returned because of the bad arrangement of material. While the thought is good, the material is not logically arranged and blended, so that the current of the thought is frequently broken, when it should be continuous, thus greatly weakening and impoverishing the whole. The paragraphs should blend,

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should shade into one another, instead of being put together like a crazy quilt, with squares of entirely different colors side by side.

It is just about as reasonable for the writers of such articles to expect to sell their wares as it would be for a dry-goods merchant to expect to sell goods by tumbling them helter-skelter all about his store, regardless of order or arrangement, with shoes and thread, silks and blankets all mixed, on the theory that the customer would find what he wanted.

A progressive storekeeper knows that an attractive display of goods in his store is of immense importance, because of the impression it will make upon his customers. He will not say

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that he has splendid goods and the manner of their arrangement will not make much difference. On the contrary, he pays a big salary to men of artistic ability just to arrange his show window in the most effective and striking manner.

Editors are too busy to rewrite articles, no matter how promising the material, and so must reject even good matter if badly presented. An effective writer must have artistic ability. He must have a good sense of proportion, of logical order; he must have a good idea of perspective, so as not to bring in the foreground a subordinate thought which belongs in the background, and vice versa.

There are many canvases that show

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great ability, but the artist did not have sufficient patience, was not sufficiently painstaking to do the little things, to give the infinite number of little touches, to make the little blendings, which characterize the work of the great masters. When some one told Michael Angelo that his long, laborious touching up of his masterpieces, after they seemed perfect to an amateur, were trifles, he replied, "Yes, but trifles make perfection."

In a great masterpiece we find a center, to which all other objects and figures on the canvas are subordinated, so that if your eye catches any object, except that which expresses the central idea, it will seem to say to you, "This canvas was not painted to show me off;

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I am subordinated here in the perspective, in order to emphasize and to bring out with greater vividness and prominence the central thought, the central idea. Every figure and object on this canvas, outside of that one which expresses the supreme purpose of the artist, is but a signboard pointing the beholder to the central figure.”

Literary masterpieces are constructed in the same way. Many a writer of great artistic ability along certain lines has fallen short of fame because of his lack of perspective and because of his disregard of details.

Young writers attribute Kipling's fame to unusual genius. No doubt he has a great deal of natural ability, yet many of these young writers would

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not deign to rewrite a story from eight to ten times, as Kipling does, in order to express his thought in the most forceful, clear and concise manner before giving it to the public. They expect, without his genius, with a tithe of his experience and carefulness, to write a story in a few hours, and then they feel injured because it is returned.

There are writers to-day whose names are only occasionally seen in print, who ten years ago were in the forefront of the literary world. They have dwindled and disappeared because they were careless writers. Their early success made them over-confident and they thought the world was waiting for whatever they could produce; so

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they wrote anything that came along without much consideration, but merely to fill the required space, until they found both the demand and the price for their productions lessening.

Few people realize the labor with which literary success is generally attained. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the famous English wit, left a reputation for his *bon mots*, which seemed absolutely impromptu. Yet, after his death, looking over his memorandum books, it was found that his wittiest sayings had been carefully worked up, written and rewritten, until they attained the perfect epigrammatic form which made him famous.

Many a writer would give all of his books for Gray's "Elegy" of only a

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few stanzas, but what that "Elegy" meant to Gray in work and endeavor no one can ever estimate. It was the concentration of a life's endeavor. It has been the despair of many a writer since, for in that "Elegy" he set the pace for all the writers that came after him. Even the stanzas he excluded seem to us as complete and beautiful as those which compose the exquisite poem. Study his choice and use of words. Study Tennyson and Wordsworth. The restrictions imposed by poetry call out the finest efforts of the mind. Read Tennyson's "Palace of Art," and see how much he expresses in a single line. Consider the picture painted in the six words, "Lit by a low, large moon," all words of one syllable.

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How simple the words! How complete the picture!

In order to write effectively it is necessary to study simple writers. Take the Bible, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Franklin, Emerson, Thoreau, Mark Twain. Copy sentences from them—not for the purpose of imitating, but to become familiar with their anatomy. Writing has its machinery. Only by literal copying can this machinery be seen perfectly. When sentences are taken apart in this manner their entire construction is laid bare. “How wholesome,” says Walter Pater, “to consider the bones of the structure!” The student sees by analysis how words have been transposed to lend force, how one or two words have been ma-

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nipulated in a way that makes them do duty for five or six or ten. Short cuts suggest themselves. Copy prolix writing as well. Take the gossip of stilted newspaper writers—editorials, “topics of the day,” “feminine fads and frills.” This sort of writing is done against space, and the object of the writers is to make a little thought go a long way toward filling a column. The copying of such writing is a most excellent lesson in “how not,” just as the analyzing of “Pilgrim’s Progress,” or the Book of Ruth, is a lesson in “how.”

Few young writers are willing to pay the price that the master authors have paid for their fame—years of training and practise, infinite patience in mastering the details of their art.

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Just as young musicians always want to learn a "piece" to play or sing before they become grounded in the principles of music and master its technique, young writers are always anxious to see their writings in print before they have mastered the first principles of composition.

Buffon rewrote one of his books fifteen times before he would give it to the public. De Maupassant toiled for seven years under one of the masters of French literature before he became famous as a writer of short stories. Every manuscript he submitted during that time, his master destroyed. Then came a day when he was permitted to publish a story, and he stepped at one stride into the front

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row of authors. Every successful writer serves an apprenticeship, and his first attempts are frequently returned as "unavailable." But some day a story is accepted, and the striving writer realizes that through all rebuffs and discouragements he has been learning how to write acceptably to publishers and the public.

When disgusted and discouraged and tempted to throw your composition into the waste-paper basket, put it aside. Many a writer has been tempted to throw things into the waste basket which have afterward made him immortal. The manuscript you now condemn may be one of the best you have ever written. Wait until you can bring to it a fresh mind, a cool,

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impartial judgment. I doubt if any writer has not been tempted at times to throw aside his writings and begin anew. Never decide anything of importance when discouraged, "blue," or tired. The faculties are not then in a condition to exercise good judgment. They must be fresh, spontaneous, and vigorous, or the decision will be defective.

Do not be discouraged because your manuscript is rejected. Rejected manuscripts have made many a writer. Ella Wheeler Wilcox says that at the beginning of her literary career she sent one article to nineteen different editors before it was accepted. James Whitcomb Riley had a great struggle for recognition. It took A. Conan

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Doyle many years to get a foothold. This has been the experience of many of our greatest and most successful writers.

STYLE AND SPIRIT

MANY writers do not give sufficient attention to style. They think that the main thing is to get the thought into the composition, to fill it with ideas or sensations, and that manner or form requires little consideration. They are like people who look upon attention to style in dress as frivolous, as not in keeping with the solid, the substantial; who regard those who spend any time in improving their appearance as superficial; they think that style in an author is affectation.

The fact is, style is the soul of

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writing. It is not mere ornamentation, not decoration, not affectation. There is a character quality in it. It is more than dress to the individual. It is a part of the thing itself.

If a writer disdains style he will lack all charm and forcefulness of appeal. What superb ability and splendid talent are often lost in awkward, bungling, slipshod expressions! It is useless for a would-be writer to try to learn the art of portraying things if he lacks the artistic sense and the ambition to acquire a fine literary technique.

On the other hand, there is such a thing as over-straining artistically. Some writers strain so hard for effect that their writing is unnatural,

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cramped, over-done. Woodenness spoils many writers who are too painfully methodical in the construction of their sentences, in the arrangement of their thoughts, too precise and angular in their composition. They lack flexibleness, limpidity.

If you try too hard to look pretty, you will look ugly. I know women who strain so hard to look pretty in the photographer's chair that their pictures turn out to be positively hideous. Self-consciousness is one of the writer's greatest foes. It keeps him from being natural. It makes him stilted. The self-conscious person is always posing; if he is a writer, he is always thinking of the effect of his sentences, wondering what people will say or

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think of his book. We do our great things unconsciously.

Absorption in the theme, spontaneity, naturalness, are imperative to a high order of literary production.

When the musician forgets self, there is something in his music that awakens the very depths of the soul, and you are lifted to a fairer world than you ever before knew. When the artist forgets himself, his pictures are given immortal life, and every touch reveals a universe of indescribable beauty. When the orator forgets himself, he speaks as one having authority, and you inwardly feel that every word he says is truth. When the writer forgets his personal self and the greater interior self is given

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full possession of both the mentality and the personality—it is then that his greatest work is done. It is then only that real ability, genuine talent, even genius can appear.

Dead-in-earnestness is a very vital quality in a writer. It does not matter how large his vocabulary, how elegant his style, how painstakingly he balances his sentences or turns his paragraphs, if he lacks earnestness, absorption, if he is hollow-hearted, affected, the reader will feel it.

Many writers sacrifice their ideas to smooth English. They lose the vigor of statement, robustness of expression, the effectiveness they might have by trimming too much, trying to smooth, to polish their language

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into a too conventional form. The individuality is squeezed out of it.

A writer or an orator who really has something to say “masters the English language” in the sense that he does not permit it to master him.

“How many errors did you find in this sermon of mine?” asked Mr. Beecher of his stenographer.

“Just two hundred and sixteen,” was the reply.

“Young man,” said the great Beecher, “when the English language gets in my way, it does not stand much of a chance.”

Young writers ought to study the style of a man like Carlyle, who, perhaps, went to the other extreme from the over-polishers. A really great

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writer merely has signs or vehicles to convey his ideas to the reader. His ideas are larger than the word-vehicles. A great writer does not convey his thoughts in words that are only half-filled with ideas. The words fit the ideas; they are filled full to overflowing.

Facility of expression is one of the most difficult things to acquire. *True art is to conceal art.* The great actor must be such a master of his technique that you cannot trace any vestige of effort in his acting. Apparently, he is absolutely lost in the character he assumes. The writer also must acquire such a facile pen by long experience that the reader cannot discern the tracks of his years of hard

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work. His style and expression must seem as natural and easy as his breathing.

An author says, "I can paint any thought-landscape my brain can picture." This writer doubtless has developed a rich technique; he commands language as an artist controls colors. Doubtless, too, he produces while the inspiration is active.

COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE LITERARY PROFESSION

JOHAN OLIVER HOBBS (Mrs. Craigie), when lecturing in this country, said: "The latter-day American writers exhibit a tendency toward the slipshod in their work, a sacrifice of style in the effort to realize the general impression sought to be created."

There certainly is truth in this criticism. The rush and strife of our strenuous life is undoubtedly reflected in the composition of our writers.

Everything to-day is hurried up. Instead of studying the plot or the

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subject for months and years, and traveling to get material and atmosphere, many of our writers work from hurry-up orders. The book or the article must be finished at such a time. The articles must be ready for a certain issue of a magazine, or the book must meet the demand of the publisher.

The result is that the composition of many American writers has the tracks of hurry, or nervous haste, in it. The average American writer thinks comparatively little of style, in the sense in which the old English writers regarded it.

The explanation of the difference in their viewpoint is evident. The old classical writer did not have the great

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money temptation that the present-day writer has. He worked more as the masters of painting did—for posterity. The love of his work and the desire to find in it his immortality was his impelling motive, whereas to-day our literature is tainted with commercialism.

When a modern writer is discussed, almost the first question people ask is, “What is his income from his writings?” Such great emphasis is placed to-day upon money that everybody thinks he must have it, and if he does not have it, he is a nobody. The result is that in every profession the great struggle is to produce dollars. The dollar-marks are all over much of our literature and art. Think of

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a modern Milton working for years upon a poem and selling it for fifteen pounds, a modern Oliver Goldsmith selling a "Deserted Village" for three hundred dollars! Why, some of our magazine writers to-day will not put a pen to paper for any kind of an article for less than five hundred dollars; some of them a thousand, some twelve hundred and fifty—more than Emerson's entire income for a year!

Many writers have a fixed price, so much per word. The idea of writing for so much a word is all wrong. As if quantity could be of more importance than quality! Every little while writers notify their publishers that thereafter their prices will be raised to so much a word; then, after a few months,

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there is notice of another raise. Think of estimating in dollars and cents the value of an article or story before it is written!

Quality alone should fix the standard of compensation. A thousand words of one writer may be worth more than a thousand of another; or a thousand of the same writer in one article may be worth more than ten thousand of his words in another article.

Now, think of any one trying to reach fame and immortality by writing on this basis! An artist might as well try to fix the price of his masterpiece before he bought his canvas. If he is going to paint his soul into his picture, if he is going to put himself

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into it, he cannot tell how long it will take him or how much it will be worth when it is done.

It is doubtful whether America can produce much literature that will live during this money-mad age, when everything is measured by the dollar.

In the golden age of English literature, the writer who had produced something for immortality, if it were no more than a dozen verses, no matter how poor or how seedy his clothes, no matter if he lived in an attic in dire poverty, was a more welcome guest upon any important occasion than a man, however rich in money, who had produced nothing immortal.

THE RESERVE BEHIND EXPRESSION

WHEN a lady was complimenting Turner upon one of his wonderful masterpieces, he said, touching his forehead: "Ah, madam, you ought to see the painting in here." When the painter compares that ineffable picture, that indescribable beauty of coloring in his imagination with the actual picture he has put on the canvas, he feels that he has mistaken his calling. The difficulty of adequately expressing oneself by the painter's brush or the sculptor's chisel, or by written words, cannot be fully appreciated by those who simply look

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at the picture or the statue, or read the printed page. But in the artist himself imagination is so strong and vivid that he sees and feels infinitely more than he can express in any tangible form. He is powerless to translate into any sensuous form the elusiveness of pure beauty of feeling and of thought which enraptures his soul.

“I wonder if ever a song was sung,
 But the singer’s heart sang sweeter!
I wonder if ever a hymn was rung,
 But the thought surpassed the meter!
I wonder if ever a sculptor wrought
Till the cold stone echoed his ardent thought!
Or if ever a painter, with light and shade,
The dream of his inmost heart portrayed?”

Words are so inadequate to express the exact shades of thought, at best they are such awkward, bungling

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thought vehicles, that the delicate tints, the exquisite shading of ideas, are often lost in transit from the writer's mind to his readers.

Herbert Spencer says that language is inevitably a compromise with thought, that we must always reckon that no idea can be expressed in words without loss. No language is expressive or delicate enough to convey perfectly our thought or feeling. This cannot be done through any material media, but only through some species of wireless mental transmission or telepathy, as in the case of some souls who are so closely akin that they almost think in unison. The great, universal human emotions transcend in their expression all limitations of lan-

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guage. Sarah Bernhardt moves her audience to the depths in any part of the world, even where people do not know a word of French; just as great throngs listen with laughter and tears to an opera when they do not know a word the singers utter.

When a writer expresses himself as truthfully, as feelingly, as fervidly, and as richly as possible, the reader receives a great deal more from him than the mere language conveys. There is an overplus of thought, of emotions, a deep suggestiveness, between the lines. Indeed, the best things some writers say are not in their actual words, but in the richness of their suggestion, in the overrun of the words.

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No one can ever exhaust the meaning between the lines of Emerson's writings. No matter how many times he reads his essays, no one feels that he has drawn out all their significance. We know that the words themselves are only signboards which point us to the real thing that Emerson had in mind. The words only suggest the larger, superber idea which Emerson struggled to convey imperfectly through words. It is this reserve which we call suggestion in any art.

There are pictures which you never care to look at more than once. They may be very pretty, very attractive, but you see all there is in them at a glance. But you may look at Raphael's Sistine Madonna or Millet's

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Angelus a thousand times, and yet always see something new; for you feel the great power back of them which says infinitely more than is expressed in the tints on the canvas.

The best thing is not what the great orator says, but what he makes you feel. People who heard Webster and Phillips tell us that even in their greatest flights of oratory they could not help feeling that there was something infinitely greater behind what they said, that these men had a superhuman reserve power and could do marvelous things if put to the test. So there must be a sense of reserve in all great writing. This is the quality which is tested by the continued interest which a piece of composition calls out in the

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reader, no matter how many times he reads it.

If you feel, when reading a book, that the author has said the greatest thing possible to him, you will not be impressed with his power; but if the matter comes so naturally and so easily that it suggests something infinitely greater back of it all, then you feel the power of the man back of his pen; you know that he has written a great book; that he is a literary artist.

We get an impression from meeting a person which is independent of the words he speaks—a subtle something which radiates from his person, his manner, his character. It is said that people who saw Lincoln, even though they did not hear him speak or know

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who he was, felt somehow that they were in the presence of a great man.

Just so, there is an indescribable atmosphere about a great book which is not in the words, but in that which it makes the reader feel. There is something in every author's writings which eludes analysis, but which the reader feels, just as he feels an impalpable emanation from the presence of a man whom he meets face to face.

It is not so much what the great writer says as what he shows you, what he makes you feel. You walk with him on the mountain tops and he gives you a glimpse of beauty which fascinates you. He allows you to look into the unfathomable depths of thought; a sense of unutterable wonder over-

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whelms you, though he cannot himself express to you all you feel.

The immortal writer and artist are merely mediums for omnipotent power to work through. We make the connection with this power through the mind when we read their books, through the eyes when we behold their masterpieces, and we feel the divine thrill, the immortal shock of our contact with it.

This suggestive or reserve power behind the artist, be he painter, poet, musician or writer, is a highly composite man. A great self-mastery—a powerful concentration—a marvelous life-focusing ability—must be back of it all. There are a hundred elements, countless rich experiences, remarkable

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gifts of nature, which go to make up this reserve.

His own "composite man" is every person's genius. The greater the writer's personality, the greater the work he will produce. Out of the richness of his own life, his knowledge, his sympathy, his earnestness and courage for hard work, his ability to feel and express the pulsing life all around him, must his creations come. If you would be a writer, say the biggest thing you have in you to say; say it with all your might, feeling no sacrifice too great for the realization of its expression; overflow your words with the reserve of your soul. Then you will have given your best, and your writings will live.

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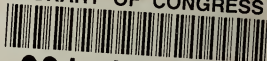


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